

# The Morris Method: Befriending the "Stimpmonster"



*Dr. Thomas A. Nikolai of Michigan State University entertains an audience of golfers and superintendents about the correct way to utilize the Stimpmeter.*

*Consider these two guidelines when using the Stimpmeter.*

*First, "The Stimpmeter is not intended for course comparison."*

*Second, "It is not the intention of the USGA to attempt to standardize green speeds, which should remain up to course officials, with the input of the superintendent, of each individual facility."*

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These two "implied directives" appear in the instruction manual for the Stimpmeter but are not practiced out in the field. Apparently they have been locked away since the USGA released Eddie Stimpson's Stimpmeter 26 years ago. Actually, I don't believe that the Stimpmeter was released; I believe it got away! The Stimpmeter got out of its cage, and ran! It ran like the wind! Like the cartoon character Tasmanian devil, but rabid! Infecting everyone in its path with the misinterpreted procedures that we use today!

For 26 years, the misuse of the Stimpmeter has been breaking spirits, stressing grass, upsetting superintendents and dumbing down the golf course industry. This amazing tool has been exploited and abused with no end in sight. It's not the Stimpmeter's fault; it's our fault!

When I watch a Sunday final round of a PGA Tour event, and Johnny Miller says something about the greens rolling 13 because they are drying out, and the "grain" of the bentgrass is leaning north while the *Poa annua* grass is leaning south causing the ball to roll faster uphill than downhill, I want to cry. Exaggeration, yes, but what have we done? We have created a monster! A Stimpmonster!

I don't blame our favorite commentators for these false proclamations. They are only uttering what they have theorized because people listen to them. They are hired to dazzle the audience with their charm, great golf knowledge and nicely tailored outfits. They are golf's ringmasters! You know, like in a circus!

Eddie Stimpson wrote the guidelines cited above because he could foresee the Stimpmeter being used in ways other than the intentions for its use. He told us that it is up to us to figure out what is the ideal green speed for our course. But he never tells us how to get there, for a good reason. It's more art than science. And finally, the cure is here! It's called EDUCATION (the knowledge or skills obtained by a learning process)—more specifically, "The Morris Method" (an approach described by Dr. Thom Nikolai of Michigan State University).

"The Morris Method" helps us better understand the Stimpmeter and its intended use. The name of this protocol comes from Michael Morris, CGCS, of Crystal Downs C.C. in Frankfort, MI, who tamed this massive beast (the Stimpmeter) when he decided he needed to find the ideal green speed for his course.

How do we find the ideal green speed for our golf course?

This question led to a two-year research collaboration between Crystal Downs and Michigan State University. From this research came a three-step process for determining your golf course's ideal green speed:

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**Step 1:** Collect data/Stimp greens regularly.

**Step 2:** Collect golfer data/ get feedback from golfers.

**Step 3:** Evaluate maintenance practices/adjust practices for ideal speed.

To find out what speeds the members were most comfortable with, Mike conducted a golfer survey among a group of regular golfers at the course. The survey simply requested that golfers complete the following sentence: "Today's greens were . . ."

- Too slow
- Slow/Okay
- Okay
- Fast/Okay
- Too fast

It was each golfer's job to circle what he or she thought was most appropriate after the daily round. Meanwhile, Mike and company collected Stimpmeter data twice daily, at 7 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., on two greens that best represented all the greens on the course. After comparing the survey data and the Stimpmeter data, the staff established the ideal green speed for the course at 9.5 to 10 feet. When the greens were in this range, 80% of the surveyed golfers said they were okay or fast/okay. Anything above 10.5 was too fast for the greens at Crystal Downs.

Every golfer wants to have his or her own input, and this survey was the perfect way for all golfers to say what they felt to the superintendent while still making him look great. The golfers at Crystal Downs took a great interest in this survey and now have become more educated and more excited about their greens. Moreover, the golfers learned that every golf course is different. Since the greens at Crystal Downs are very contoured, the acceptable Stimp ranges for this course may be different from those at a course with less undulation on its greens. These golfers know what speed makes them happy and can tune out when someone on TV or a member at a neighboring course tells them what their speeds should be. Once golfers understood the goal, concerns over green speed were in the history books.

The next step for Mike was to adjust his cultural practices to produce ideal greens on a day-to-day



basis, all season long. Since the crew measured green speeds twice daily, Mike was able to easily examine what had been done that day and how it was affecting that day's speed. Mike found that "the greatest swings in speed we recorded could be traced directly to a mower that was not sharp or not properly adjusted." Mike looked at every aspect of his cultural practices, adjusting, adding and eliminating anything that might cause the greens to drastically change in speed. This process led him to an efficient approach for maintaining consistent greens throughout the season.

Now it's time for YOU to take control of your green speeds and use the Stimpmeter to earn great respect from your customers or members. "The Morris Method" has addressed the question that many have been pondering for years. How do we find the ideal green speed for our course? It's up to you and your club to find that answer. All you need are the three easy steps:

1. Measure your greens on a regular basis to determine the range of speeds at your course.

2. Involve golfers to get feedback on their preferred putting-surface conditions.
3. Adjust your maintenance practices to meet the preferred and manageable range you have determined from above.

Modify and customize this method to fit yours and your golfers' needs. The answer won't come to you overnight, though. You and your patrons will have to work together for the answer. Once you have that, your greens will be under control!

If you have any questions, or want to learn more about "the Morris Method," you may contact Dr. Thom Nikolai at Michigan State University, 517-355-0271, ext. 133.



## References

"Tools of the Trade," Dr. Thom Nikolai, Grounds Maintenance, October 2003.

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Terra Aerator

T.I.P., INC.  
Greens Spiker/Seeder  
Amazone/Groundskeeper  
Amazone/Combo Seeder

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